

Best I Can by blithesea, womenseemwicked

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Summary:

Steve has bad dreams. Billy has other demons driving him out into the night.

Best I Can

Author's Note:

Billy POV by ficsandfuckery ([women-seem-wicked](#) on tumblr), Steve POV by blithesea ([bites-heal](#) on tumblr).

Steve is driving. It's 1:17 am on a Thursday, and for the first time in what feels like forever he's woken up to a cold sweat and the feeling of teeth still sharp on his mind. There are things he does when he can't sleep, like humming a song to himself or counting the horizontal lines in his curtains, or in the past few weeks, thinking about Billy, which usually leads to thinking about having sex with Billy. Which usually doesn't make him any more sleepy, but at least makes him feel a lot better.

Not tonight, though, tonight Steve attempts for a whole five minutes to think about math to make himself fall asleep, rather than think about Billy because the thoughts are too painful and the pain is too embarrassing. Because Billy hasn't called.

Billy hasn't called, and that shouldn't be anything for Steve to lose sleep over. Hell, he was the King of Not Calling Back himself, once upon a time. He shouldn't give a flying fuck, because Billy would laugh so hard if he knew Steve has been waiting around the telephone, again, like a teenage girl. It's ridiculous, and if asked Steve would flat out deny it. But that doesn't change the way that after that time on Monday when they'd fucked... well, he had kinda expected Billy to call him afterward. Not that he thinks Billy's cutting him loose now they've finally done it. No. He wouldn't do that.

Would he though?

So Steve slips away from his empty, boring bedroom where there is too much soft bed and warmth and no Billy at all, and gone for a ride. Not really hoping for anything, but if he takes the usual routes he sometimes used to meet Billy on, it's merely for nostalgia. Billy probably has better things to do at night nowadays. And if every time he sees another car's headlights and his heart sinks a little when they

don't belong to Billy's Camaro, well. That's just what not sleeping enough does to you, probably.

--

Billy hasn't slept well in two nights. He's spent both hiding in his room, chain-smoking cigarettes and reading Dostoevsky, blasting Mötley Crüe through headphones just to drown out his nagging thoughts until he falls asleep. For these past few nights, home has almost felt like a refuge from what he's let develop between him and Harrington; the feelings he's starting to have serious trouble ignoring as they grow in his gut whenever the other boy turns that soft smile on him, or touches his skin like it's made out of glass.

But tonight Neil's ruined that. Reminded him that home will never be a refuge from anything. And as he shrugs on his jacket and finds his car keys, Billy wants nothing more than to call Steve. To apologize for not calling earlier. To ask if they're still on for Friday. Because the thought of his soft touches, the thought of a night away from this, all sounds so good right now. Damn the consequences and the fact that, not for the first time in his life, he's let himself develop an attachment to someone who can't possibly feel the same way.

But the thought seems to clarify in his mind as Billy keeps driving, orangey street lamps flickering past outside the window hypnotically, that he doesn't really care if he gets hurt. *I don't want to lose this*, he thinks. *Whatever this is, it's pretty fucking good. And whether Harrington comes to his senses or not, drops the ball and outs us both or not, 'better to have loved and lost' and all that shit, right?*

He's feeling pretty confident in his philosophy until he sees headlights in his rear-view and realizes after a moment of them following too close that they're Steve Harrington's. *Fuck. No. Not tonight*, Billy begs the universe, but he pulls off the road at the next dark, secluded shoulder, and throws his car into park anyway.

--

Steve almost has a heart attack when the Camaro barrels past him at a crossing. He only hesitates a moment before following, because, ok. Maybe he has been driving with the hope of seeing Billy. It's still a

surprise that it worked.

Only Billy keeps driving like a madman, speeding down straight lanes as if he's training for a race. Steve starts tailing him properly for a bit, but when Billy just keeps going, he starts wondering if he should cut out and head back home. Maybe Billy just isn't in the mood to talk. Like he hasn't been in the mood these last few days. Maybe when they fucked in the locker rooms...

Steve shivers a little at the thought. Billy had been somewhat out of sorts after. Had been a bit subdued during practice later, moved like he was walking on eggshells. Hadn't played worth shit. Maybe Steve had, had... God. Maybe he had hurt Billy more than he'd thought? But back in the locker room, Billy had said he was gonna be okay...

Maybe he wasn't, Steve's brain helpfully supplies. Maybe that's why he changed his mind about all of it.

But then Billy stops his car. And though Steve isn't *absolutely* sure he wants to hear it if Billy has decided to be mean and aloof again, he parks behind Billy and gets out.

He walks the few yards, smiles when he remembers the time it was him in the car, and Billy walking over. This time he walks towards the passenger side, though, and just gets in.

"Hey," he says, not quite looking at Billy yet. His voice is feeling rough in his throat. He tries to talk over it. "What's a hot young thing like you doing out alone this late?"

--

Billy doesn't want to look at him, but with a line like that he can't help it. It's the first time he's gotten a good look in *days* - he's been avoiding looking over like it's dangerous - 'cause it is - and Steve looks, well, as distractingly pretty as ever. But he also looks sad, disappointed, worried... Billy wonders if he put all of that there. Wonders why Steve is even here if he did.

"I guess I don't sleep too well these days," he says, inadvertently perhaps a bit too honest in his attempt to quote the first night that

they did this.

He looks out through the windshield like there's something to see, but there isn't. Not with both their cars off and no lights of any kind for at least a mile.

--

Well, there it is. Billy is definitely something. What, though? Is he pissed at Steve? Just tired? Steve shoots him a sideways glance, but he can't be sure. Is Billy avoiding his eyes?

"You okay, man?" He asks, careful not to sound too, well. Too clingy? Too emotional. He really wants to hear it, though. Billy isn't giving him anything to go on.

--

Billy turns back to Steve with a slightly startled glance and frowns. Bites his lip. After a while, he shakes his head and looks away again.

"I'm driving, aren't I?"

--

Shit. So there is something. And Billy is doing that silent thing, where you have to pry every word out of him with a crowbar, like he did on the weekend. But he's here, and he stopped for Steve. So maybe he wants Steve's company, just a bit. That's something, at least.

"What's the matter?" Steve asks, shifting in his seat to face Billy and give him his full attention. He wants desperately to touch Billy now, but, no. Better not to push it.

"You having bad dreams, too?" He shrugs, he hadn't meant to mention his own nightmares. *You seriously think this is about you, don't you*, Billy has once accused him. He's trying, he really is. But if he's the one who made Billy feel shitty, could anyone blame him not being too excited to hear it confirmed?

--

Billy shakes his head again.

“Not dreams, no,” he says, swallows. “Anyway, what’re *you* doing out here? I thought your nightmares had stopped.”

He looks over at Steve again, this time everywhere but his face. His jeans are slightly wrinkled, like he fell asleep in them at some point, and the sweater under his jacket is hideous but comfortable looking. The clothes of self-pity. Billy feels another pang of guilt. *Did I do this?*

He chews his bottom lip like it’s flavored with the answers to all their problems. It isn’t.

--

“Guess they came back,” Steve shrugs, looking down. He wants to say something about missing Billy. That his bad dreams had been gone when they were close. *When I got you, babe.* But, hell, that’s ridiculous. It’s only been three nights. That’s nothing.

“Are you mad at me?” He blurts out then, the whole thing is starting to be too much. “I can tell something’s not right, and, and if I did something... I mean, I know you didn’t *say* you’d call, but-- I’m not good at this, you need to tell me if I fuck up, alright? So I can make it better.”

--

Billy turns away again and covers his mouth with his hand. Plays with his bottom lip.

“It’s not you, Steve,” he finally mutters. “You’re--” he lets out a sigh that could’ve been a laugh if it’d tried a bit harder, and turns away completely, toward his own window, because his eyes are stinging and that’s just the fucking cherry on top of a swell night, isn’t it? “You’re the best thing...” He shakes his head and tries to wipe his eyes discreetly.

--

It’s subtle, but Steve has been watching Billy closely, looking for a hint of meaning in his eyes, for a clue on whether he’s fucked up, and

if yes, how badly. So he doesn't miss the way Billy swipes at his eyes, the way his voice seems wetter somehow.

"Hey," he says, worried now. "Hey, what's wrong?" He leans closer, touches Billy's shoulder, wishes he could hug him.

--

Steve's hand feels so good on his shoulder that Billy can't help but lean into it a little.

"I should have called, I just... I got spooked, I don't know. And with my dad home it's hard to know he won't pick up the other line and..." He turns to look at Steve discerningly, worried. "You aren't mad?" he asks, unsure of which answer he'd prefer.

--

"Mad?" Steve asks, and shakes his head, snorting. "No? Heartbroken, maybe a little. I mean, I was sitting next to the phone for the last three days like an idiot..."

He smiles at Billy to show that he's kidding. Well, half-kidding, at least. "I mean, literally, every second out of school. Like, I had my mom bring me meals to the phone? And I slept with it next to me on my pillow? I even took it into the shower, but that didn't work out too well..."

He leans in closer, takes Billy's hand. Links their fingers together.

--

Billy's first instinct is to pull away. *Asshole. Now you're fucking with me.* But he looks at Steve's face and he's studied it enough to realize there's truth there. He really waited. Wanted that call. But somehow he's not mad at him for not calling like a jackass. Billy's mystified that such a person can exist. And that such a person could want him. He gives Steve's hand a squeeze.

"I'm sorry, pretty boy," he says. "I'm an idiot. You deserve so much better."

--

That turn of phrase always sounds dangerously like a brush-off. *You deserve better, and that certainly isn't me.* Steve shrugs. He doesn't know what he does or doesn't deserve, he only knows what he wants, and that he's glad Billy seems to want him back. Most of the time.

He wants to make a joke of it, ask Billy what he deserves, then. A pony? But Billy doesn't seem like he's ready for jokes yet.

"You're fine," he says instead, and touches his lips to Billy's knuckles.

--

Billy watches Steve's lips closely. Feels his skin tingle where they touch him. But his smile is hesitant. *You're fine. You'll do.* He has so much work to do to be better for this boy, it's overwhelming.

--

The silence makes Steve realise he needs to do better, Billy is usually so quick with his words. He's not even *trying* now. It's a bit scary. If he has to stroke Billy's ego to get him out of this mood, he will.

"You want me to list all the ways you're fine? I can do that," he says. "Just give me a minute. There's so many of them, it's hard to pick one to start with..."

--

Billy's heart beats a little harder. *Is he fucking with me?* But it doesn't look like Steve is. Billy wonders if he can get Steve to tell him all those things without asking. Bites his lip to keep from speaking, because he really wants to know, needs to hear that right now.

So he pulls Steve closer to him and turns his head to go directly for his cheek, pointedly leaving the older boy's lips free for talking as he starts off with soft, chaste kisses and works his way down to his jaw and the meeting of his neck.

--

“Well, okay, I’ll start with the easy ones, first,” Steve says, sighs when Billy kisses a particular spot on his neck that sends a shiver down his spine. “Your lips. Your mouth. Your, your smile, when you do that thing you do. When you smile like you want to eat me up with a spoon?”

He imagines that he can feel Billy smile against his neck, and that encourages him to keep going.

“Your tongue,” he has to smile at that one. “Okay, maybe *fine* isn’t the right word. Let’s change it to the things that are really really great. I mean, this is gonna take awhile. Stop me when you’ve heard enough.”

Billy isn’t making any move to stop him, Steve realises with a grin. He angles his throat to give Billy some more space to work with. “Your, uh, your eyes. The way they sometimes light up.”

He takes a moment before saying, “Your ass. I know, I skipped a whole lot in between, but it’s just a *really* great ass.”

--

Billy’s liking this. They’re not exactly things he needs reassurance of - he knows he looks good, shit he *works* at it - but they’re things he believes, which is nice. The way his father talks sometimes, makes him forget even those things about himself. Makes him feel so fucking small. And hearing Steve lose his breath a little just thinking about them - or perhaps from the fact that he’s made his kisses a bit harder now and added tongue to them - makes him feel like he takes up some space in the world, and like he might just be worth that space.

--

Steve lets his free hand trail over Billy’s chest. “This is great, too,” he murmurs, cupping the swell of Billy’s chest.

“And your arms, you’re so fucking built... But you’re still fast as hell on the court. ‘S not fair, actually,” he complains. “You should, uh, either be ripped *or* be good at basketball. Otherwise how are the rest

of us idiots gonna keep up?”

He can't actually see it, but he imagines he can feel Billy be smug about that one.

“And you're smart,” he continues, “Like, I know you can think circles around me. I always have had a thing for the smart ones...”

--

Billy can't help but laugh a little, quietly, against Steve's skin at that. Pushes Steve's jacket down his arms a little and pulls the collar of his sweater down to access the very top of his still just barely California-tanned chest.

I'm not smart, baby. Not really. If I was I wouldn't be here, for a start, he wants to say. But he doesn't. Instead he helps Steve out of his jacket, trailing hands down his warmly sweated arms as he continues to press lips and tongue into every patch of skin he can reach. Hums a little to encourage him.

--

“You're kinda making it hard to concentrate now,” Steve smiles, but he still doesn't want Billy to stop. It feels nice, just letting Billy do his thing, while he's too busy to participate a lot. There isn't enough room to move in though, he can barely shift in his seat enough to face Billy.

“You wanna maybe move this to the back seat? So we have a bit more space to work with?”

--

Billy nods before he knows it, mumbling against his skin, and pulls away reluctantly, licking his lips and breathing heavy.

“Yeah,” he says, and pushes the door behind him open without looking. And then he's out the door and pulling the driver's seat forward to climb into the back before Steve can even start to move. Because he's so touch-starved he could cry, and Steve's body is kind of breathtakingly gorgeous. Any chance to see more of it is a chance

Billy wants to take.

--

"Alright." Steve scrambles to get out of the door, because Billy is miles ahead of him. He climbs into the back from his own side and his ass barely has the chance to touch the leather seat before Billy is pulling him close for a kiss. And, fuck. It feels like they haven't properly kissed in a month.

"Mmmmh," Steve smiles, shivers when Billy's hand touches his bare side where his sweatshirt has ridden up. "Now where was I-- right. Smart... like, I've seen your notes for Lit, and you could probably sell them to other people..."

--

Billy can't help smirking into the skin of Steve's jaw as he pulls his sweater up further and nudges for him to let him take it off, along with the shirt under it.

"If you saw my Lit notes you also saw how messy and scrambled and dotted with random thoughts they are," he points out, because his mouth is left with nothing to do as Steve slips out of his shirts with a shiver.

He reaches forward and turns the keys in the ignition just enough to get the heater going again before pushing Steve down on the seat and pressing his lips back to his chest.

"But keep going, sweetheart," he says. "You're making my night a little less shit."

--

"Uh..."

Shit, it's getting hard to think while Billy gives him more and more to be distracted by. Steve tries to clear his head while Billy worries one of his nipples with his teeth.

"Well, you're smart in other ways, too. Like, during basketball..." It's

a bit strange to be thinking of basketball while they're making out in the backseat of Billy's car, but that's what comes to Steve's mind. "When you know what move to make, in a split-second. And you can see what, what other people should be doing, uh, to be better, like you tell me how I can improve my game..."

He smiles at that memory. "You're generous," he says softly, and that feels like a weird thing to say, but it's true.

--

Billy sits up a little at that. Because, *generous*? That's not a compliment he's been given before. In fact he's been told the opposite. Repeatedly. Tonight, even. And he's not sure he believes it, but it feels so nice anyway, coming from Steve's sweet, honest lips.

He leans down over him and presses their mouths together hungrily because suddenly all Billy wants is to kiss the mouth that has so many praises for him in spite of everything. To swallow his words until he believes that they're true. He slips his tongue into Steve's soft mouth, and keeps his hands moving restlessly over his chest, keeping him warm with his own body heat and the friction of his touch.

--

Billy is stealing his breath away now, what with his kisses and the way he touches Steve, but he still hasn't shed a thread of clothing. Unfair, that; how can Steve be expected to be fully coherent now? He shifts up in the seat to get to divest Billy of his jacket, at least. Then he hesitates. There are marks on Billy's neck. Steve frowns, tries to think of whether he put them there, on Monday maybe? But, no. These look new. And he'd have noticed them during basketball practice.

"Hey, what happened to your neck?" he asks, running his fingers over the dark splotch on Billy's skin. Finger-sized?

--

Billy's blood runs cold and he swats Steve's hand away, re-covering his neck with his jacket collar as he pulls away.

“s nothing,” he mumbles. “It’s fine. I... fell...” He knows it’s not convincing, but he’s shaking a little now just remembering, and what they have is too new for that shit. Too fresh. Too fragile. Neil would fucking break it, whether directly or indirectly. And the thought of that sends a wave of panic through his veins.

--

“You fell?” Steve blinks. He’s trying to make sense of that, not of the fact that the bruises don’t look anything like Billy fell -- he’s not a complete idiot, he can tell this was someone’s hand -- but of the fact that Billy is lying to him. Why would he do that?

Billy has clammed up completely, in a second, and he’s fucking shaking. What the hell?

“What happened, baby?” Steve asks, now genuinely worried. “Did someone jump you, after school? Did they-- oh shit, it wasn’t Tommy, was it?” No way, Billy could take Tommy in a heartbeat.

--

Billy shakes his head curtly, takes his hand and entwines their fingers tight. But he can’t meet Steve’s eyes for anything.

“Steve... don’t...”

--

“Can’t you tell me what happened, babe?” Steve asks carefully, because Billy looks like he’s freaking out. But what could have happened that was so bad? If Billy had a fight with someone after school, he’d be laughing about it now. Showing off his bruises. Telling Steve he should see the other guy, probably.

“Is someone harassing you?” He tries to imagine what might get Billy so upset. Feels his stomach dip a little.

“Was it about the gay thing?” Fuck, but how? They’ve been so careful, everywhere.

--

Billy closes his eyes and shakes his head again.

“Not about the gay thing,” he says shiftily. “Honestly, it’s no big deal. Just let it go...”

--

Steve hates the way this makes him feel so helpless. He doesn’t want to piss Billy off, but his responses are so odd, when Billy usually isn’t one to shy away from anything.

“Alright,” he says gently. “You don’t have to tell me, it’s just... doesn’t look like no big deal. And, I mean. If someone’s being a dick to you, I...”

Okay, that’s maybe a bit stupid. Billy is much better at this hand-to-hand fighting thing than he is. But he still has that baseball bat.

“If someone’s being a dick to you, I want to kick their ass,” he finishes, squeezing Billy’s hand.

--

Billy’s bottom lip trembles a bit and he hates himself for it. Buries his face in Steve’s shoulder so he won’t see. Just shakes his head again, because what else can he do? Somehow the thought of Steve by his side in all of this helps. Feels so much better than going at it alone. But a fight is exactly what he *doesn’t* want with Neil. And he doesn’t doubt the conviction in Steve’s voice. If he finds out, he’s going to want to do *something*.

It all just makes Billy feel that much more hopeless. A victim in his own fucking home. And he’s just let all of this happen.

“You can’t,” he croaks, muffledly. “He’d just kill us both.”

--

He. Steve holds Billy close, bites his lip. Who could Billy be talking about, who could have him this cowed, this scared? *The Mindflayer*, his mind whispers, but that is bullshit. The fucking Mindflayer wouldn’t go around putting bruises on Billy’s neck.

Steve thinks of Billy, what would he have been doing that day, after practice? Gone home, probably. *He*. Oh, fuck.

The memory of Billy, yelling in a parking lot, about how his dad nearly caught them. Of the man's cold eyes when Steve dropped in on Billy just for some fucking homework. That can't be.

"Billy," Steve says, softly, so as not to spook him any further. "Baby... your dad didn't hurt you, did he?"

--

Billy's hands tighten around Steve's fingers in the one hand and his upper arm in the other and he lets out a short, shocked breath as the words hit him. But he doesn't have it in him to lie again to Steve. Not about this. So he focuses his energy instead on the tears once again threatening to fall.

--

Steve actually waits, hopes for Billy to deny it, because if he doesn't--his mind recoils from trying to imagine it. His own father? Steve knows things like that happen, he's not stupid, he's heard stories of other kids getting slapped or whatnot, but, those *bruises*... He can't wrap his mind around it.

"How?" he asks, and almost wishes he hadn't, immediately afterwards.

--

Billy laughs miserably and pulls back from Steve's neck to look at him.

"How?" he teases. And then in a darker, almost threatening voice, because he knows now and Billy needs someone to *understand*: "D'you wanna know how?"

--

No, actually. Steve has no desire to know how. He knows whatever Billy is going to tell him, it's gonna be *bad*.

But he can't back out now. That would be a cowardly thing to do. He wants to say, *You don't have to*, but instead he just nods.

--

Billy is on Steve in a moment. Only for once, it's just his left hand touching Steve. Clutching him by the neck and pressing him into the leather seat back. More gently than his father did, because he actually cares about hurting this boy, even if Neil doesn't give a shit about his own son. Steve's eyes go all surprised and defensive, and then even out a little as he realizes what's happening, and slip into something else. *Disgust*, he thinks, *worry*. Billy looks away for a moment and tries to mimic his father. The voice comes a little *too* naturally.

"I don't care what Mrs. *Robinson* says, she's only got you for one class. I *know* you. You're not *college material*, you're a fucking *punk* who has a fresh start so he thinks he's hot shit now," he growls. Only the faint bitterness in his voice at the thought that these words still ring perfectly in his ears several hours later ruining the illusion that Neil's in the car with them.

"A couple A's doesn't change the fact that you flunked your first year in high school. Are you forgetting that? You're not a 'hard worker with a keen mind,' you're a loser, a burnout. Your only job now is to make sure your sister doesn't grow up as fucked up as you are. Understand?" Billy pulls him closer and glances into Steve's deep brown eyes, and then down. Because even while in character he *cannot* say these words to another human being, let alone his fucking boyfriend Steve Harrington (who is his *boyfriend*, somehow).

"You're a selfish little shit, and unless you get your fucking act together you're not gonna amount to anything. Give up these pipe dreams, boy, and turn your focus on what's real... There's dirty dishes in the sink." Here, Neil had left him with one last shove. Billy instead ends the scene by loosening his already loose hold on Steve a little further, and caressing the spot where his hand just was a little before pulling back slowly.

"*That's* how," he mutters, looking away. And he can't tell if that was therapeutic or just draining, but he feels like he wants to nap for a

year.

--

Steve is frozen in place for what feels like an age after Billy breaks their contact, then he shivers, shakes his head. Mutters, "*Christ.*" It doesn't help.

He wants to kick himself. This kind of stuff probably goes on *all the time*, from the way Billy always acts where his father is concerned, and he just hasn't noticed before now. But the thing that kills him more than anything is that he knows Billy *held himself back*. Probably didn't even give Steve a taste of more than half of what actually went down.

"Billy," he says, and has no idea how to continue. He wants to make things better and doesn't have a clue how.

--

There's pressure in Billy's chest that just won't let up, and his eyes are stinging again as he glances up at Steve haltingly. He looks a bit like he did just before their first fight, in the Byers's front room. Protective and pissed off. This time it's different though. The shock of it all is coloring his features with disbelief too, and something else. Billy feels like his heart stops at the thought that Steve might not believe him, and he bites his bottom lip hard.

--

"Baby," Steve says helplessly, because, fuck, what the fuck can he say to make this any better? Not a fucking thing, that's what. He reaches out to touch Billy, needs to feel the connection at least, even if he can't actually undo any of this, or do anything real to help. "Fucking hell," he says hoarsely, "I'm so sorry, I didn't know, I should've--"

--

Billy frowns and shakes his head.

"There's nothing you could've done, Harrington," he says softly. His hand comes up to rest on the wrist of the one caressing the side of his

neck and he pulls Steve closer to him. "Promise me you won't try anything. It'll just make it worse. I'll be fine. It's... nothing I'm not used to dealing with..."

--

Steve winces at the matter-of-fact way Billy says that. He wants to protest, Billy going back to live with that kind of thing even for another day sounds fucking INSANE, he can't do *that*! But he can't actually think of anything to do. Billy running away? Where to? And what would he do about school? Tell Hopper? What could he do? Throw Billy's father in jail?

He wants so desperately to help, and can't think of a single thing to do. "I--" he starts, and shakes his head.

"Come to my place," he says, feeling shame heat his cheeks, because *that's* the only thing he can come up with to help his boyfriend. "You can stay with me. When it, when it gets bad. Or whenever. All the time."

--

Billy closes his eyes for a moment and sighs. Pulls Steve's hand up to his lips and kisses it regretfully, softly, sweetly. He doesn't realize the tears in his eyes are actually falling until one of them drops suddenly onto Steve's hand. He snuffles and shakes his head then.

"He doesn't touch Max," he says. "Still dotes on her like she's an angel without wings. But if I'm not there and he goes into a rage..." he looks up to meet Steve's eyes. "I'm not a good big brother by any standards, I know that. Never asked to be. But I've gotta make sure this shit doesn't get passed on to her, Steve. I have to keep her safe."

--

"No," Steve starts, and stops, because, fuck. He can't argue with that, fucking hell. He looks at Billy beseechingly. "No. That's not *fair*--"

--

Billy smiles a little against his hand.

"Life isn't fair, pretty boy," he says. "But at least I have..." he pauses, because saying it like that still feels presumptuous even now. He buries his face in Steve's hand for a moment and kisses it again. Steve's long fingers stroke his face softly. "You make it all more... Just, having you around to... to talk to, and... Fuck, Steve..." It's frustrating how nothing seems to do his feelings justice right now. He can't think of a single way to phrase this. Not a single way, but--

"I love you," he confesses breathlessly, and it feels good to say it, to put it out into the world, but in the same way that a balloon feels relief when the air is let out of it. Now he feels vulnerable and tossed on the air and like anything could fucking happen, not just the good stuff.

--

Steve can't seem to remember how to breathe for a moment. He looks up at Billy, *this* close to panicking, but at least Billy isn't looking at him. Fuck, he couldn't have borne this if Billy had looked at him just now. He wants to say something back, but the words stick in his throat, fat and unpleasant. He forces himself to take a breath, it fucking hurts in his chest. He doesn't want to get into this, Billy is fucking wrecked tonight. He's going to remember this tomorrow and regret ever saying it. With any luck, he's not going to tell Steve that it was all bullshit, but Steve doesn't want to find out.

He shivers, and kisses Billy. As long as they kiss he doesn't have to say anything back, right? Right. Kissing. He's going to kiss the stuffing out of Billy now.

--

Billy's throat feels inexplicably coarse and painful, but kisses are better than nothing, he reminds himself, especially kisses like this, that feel so very *real*. He presses into them hesitantly, afraid he's already bared too much of his soul tonight and that somehow melting into this touch like he wants to will put him over the final line into the territory of being desperate and pathetic. But God, he wants nothing more than to be fucking held right now. He's so spent and tired and Steve's body feels so good against him. He deepens the kiss just a little and snakes a hand up around Steve's back to his shoulder,

holding him tentatively.

--

Steve shifts in his seat, turning a little towards the front. He puts his arm around Billy's shoulder, breaking the kiss, and when Billy leans his head against his, he turns his head to press a kiss on Billy's temple. They don't say anything for a bit, and they don't look at each other, but the whole thing is more cozy than Steve would have thought possible, after what just happened. Outside, the wind is blowing against the car.

He clears his throat. "So, can you get away tomorrow?"

--

Billy doesn't know how to feel. On the one hand it's odd to kiss like that without the intention of one or both of them getting off, but on the other he doesn't know what he'd do if Steve wanted to do more right now. So he settles into Steve's arms, his shoulder, and nods.

"When do we meet?" he asks.

--

"I'll pick you up somewhere. It's a long drive, but you can sleep in the car." Steve thinks of all the stuff he still needs to get. Food. Drinks. Well, he can raid the party fridge again. Bedding. A fucking bouquet of roses, because that's what he promised Billy, forever ago.

"Seven, by the playground on Milsom? You could walk there from your house." Billy probably wouldn't want to leave his car by the side of some road all night.

--

"Yeah," Billy agrees. "Okay. Should I bring anything?" *Long drive.* Well that doesn't rule out many places, since Hawkins is practically the ass-end of the world, but still. *You can sleep in the car.* Billy smiles a little at the implication. *You'll need your rest. We'll be up all night.*

--

"Maybe a toothbrush," Steve smiles and shrugs. "Other than that, your gorgeous self will be enough, really." He's gonna have to take the station wagon, his Beemer would hate the dirt roads.

He takes Billy's free hand in his, rests it on his knee, but without any actual intent. Just feels good to have Billy's fingers link with his, almost by instinct now.

--

Billy smiles and closes his eyes. It still feels odd to sit like this. He's never *cuddled* like this with anyone else save, perhaps, for his mother, but that was years ago. Another lifetime. This is groundbreaking. And a little bit great.

He turns a little and plants a soft kiss on Steve's chin.

"Thank you," he says. "For everything."

--

"But I didn't do anything," Steve mumbles, deeply aware that he doesn't want Billy to go home, not yet. But tiredness is creeping up on him, blurring the edges of his consciousness. He glances at his watch.

"Oh, shit. It's almost 3..."

--

Billy glances at the watch too and grimaces at its blunt honesty.

"I've gotta get home before my old man wakes up." He leans up for another kiss and this time Steve meets it with his lips. "And you need to go get some sleep, baby, you look exhausted."

--

Steve purses his lips, grumbles, "You're one to talk."

He makes no motion to get up, though. Looks at their intertwined fingers for a moment. "Can I see you home?"

Since Billy is probably going to object, he quickly adds, “Just driving behind you. I won’t even stop. I’m gonna be so stealthy. Like a ninja, only... in a car.”

--

Billy laughs a little and squeezes Steve’s hand before kissing it one last time and letting it go. Being the one to break this up is hard when he needs it so much, but even this much has helped him enough that the need to avoid further consequences is stronger than the need to deal with the ones he was just facing. He pulls the driver’s seat back into position and struggles to crawl through the small space into his seat again, smiles when he feels Steve’s hand on his ass fleetingly, “helping to push him through,” no doubt.

“Whatever makes you happy, pretty boy,” he says, almost like it isn’t 100% true, almost like it’s a joke, and pulls Steve closer to him through the gap in the seats, as Steve shrugs his sweater back on. He presses their lips together. “Whatever makes you happy,” he says again.

Author's Note:

In case anyone is interested, there are mood-board things for each of the fics in this series up on Theo’s tumblr [here](#), great for reblogging and sharing with your friends ;)